Assessing the Information Needs of Community-based Primary Care Clinicians: Effect of Interviewer Training and Status

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Published studies of clinicians' information needs are difficult to compare because of major differences in methodology, including differences in subjects, settings, definition of terms, and data collection methods. One important issue in interview studies concerns the background of the person who conducts the interview with the clinician. How do the training, professional status, or other interviewer factors affect the quantity and quality of the information needs data that is collected? Do clinicians ask different types of questions when interviewed by interviewers of different training or professional status? We examined data from interviews with primary care clinicians to identify differences attributable to the background of the interviewer. A sample of 104 community-based nurse practitioners, physicians assistants, and physicians, stratified by rural or nonrural location and by professional degree, agreed to participate in a study of their information needs. Each clinician was interviewed during one half day of typical office practice, and clinical questions were recorded as they arose in the course of patient care. Interviews were conducted by a team of interviewers that included medical librarians, nurse practitioners, and graduate and undergraduate students with training in qualitative methods. All interviewers participated in two half-day training sessions on study objectives and interview methods specific to the study. Using univariate and multivariate techniques, this paper will examine the effect of interviewer background on the quantity and quality of information needs data collected using an office-interview technique.